



2018 – 2019
**PROGRESS
REPORT**

VICTORIAN
SERRATED TUSSOCK
WORKING PARTY



VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY PROGRESS REPORT 2018-2019

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For more information on the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party visit the website:
www.serratedtussock.com

VISION

REDUCE THE IMPACT OF SERRATED TUSSOCK ON VICTORIA'S ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES.

VSTWP COMMITTEE 2018/19

John Burgess	Chair
Lance Jennison	Vice Chair
Alan Morton	Treasurer
Peter Lindeman	Community Representative
Wendy Bitans	Community Representative
Margot Galletly	Community Representative
John Webb Ware	Community Representative
Mandy Coulson	Community Representative
Norm Cameron	Community Representative
Lachlan McIntyre	Community Representative
Laurie Watters	Community Representative
Martin Deering	Secretary, Non-voting member

VSTWP EXTENSION OFFICERS 2018/19

Ivan Carter
Roger MacRaild
Tim Johnston

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

The new 2018-2023 Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party Strategy was made available in hard copy to all key stakeholders and promoted on Facebook and the VSTWP website. Rural landowners and the general public gained access to the Strategy via Field Days, Ag Shows and the VSTWP website.

The mention of serrated tussock causes farmers or rural landowners grave concern. Serrated tussock left unmanaged, has the capacity to greatly reduce the productivity of grazing lands and in inaccessible and/or difficult to manage areas can be a continuous source of seed for whole regions. Such is the situation in neglected areas around Melbourne's north west, where formidable core infestations harbour huge latent seed beds.

The focus of the Strategy therefore is not only towards the west of Melbourne but towards north central Victoria, west and east Gippsland and Hamilton in the western district. It is the aim of the VSTWP to eventually provide serrated tussock education and control packages for all rural Victoria.

In these uncertain times of climate change, serrated tussock has an increased capacity to survive and spread. Because of this, continual effective management and control of serrated tussock must be initiated wherever it is found. The endeavours of the VSTWP Extension Officers to deliver the landholder programs at areas west of Bacchus Marsh, and other isolated infestations, includes the provision of education, support and understanding, and is of paramount importance.

In the year past, a cooperative approach has been formed between the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party and AgVic. The alliance of the parties has enhanced the identification and control of serrated tussock in Victoria. More importantly overlapping of the respective service units has been eliminated and a more systematic approach taken, which ensures improved efficiencies.

Since the last report the representation of Victorian regional rural communities has gradually increased. New members are being sought so that eventually all rural areas of Victoria affected by serrated tussock may be represented and benefit from a coordinated approach to the management and control of this Weed of National Significance (WoNS).

As at the date of this report the VSTWP registered By-Laws A00119365 remain current while necessary annual amendments to the Addendum to the By-Laws, including the LVI Code of Conduct, have been completed. VSTWP members were issued with these documents which are also available to the general public on the VSTWP website.

A progressive and important change to the Addendum to the By-Laws was to increase the number of members of the Working Party from eight (8) to fourteen (14). Presently the membership is ten (10). It is anticipated that the membership will increase in the coming year.

During 2018/2019, the VSTWP Communications and Engagement program focussed on Tussock Times, the quarterly newsletter, as well as reaching out to landowners in rural and peri-urban/rural areas via the VSTWP website, Facebook, YouTube, Television and Radio. It was noted that the VSTWP webpage hits increased markedly, after the TV and Radio programs went to air, indicating that the communication packages were reaching the targeted audience.

The effective management of Field Days and Ag Shows continues, and a wide range of venues have been visited in 2019. Two new and eminently successful events were the Elmore Field Days at Elmore and Sheepvention at Hamilton.

The White Paper Delivery Leadership Group representatives continue their excellent work. Round three, the final round of White Paper funding ends June 30th, 2020. Last year's funding was employed to commission research along with other grants. It must be recognised that White Paper Funding may only be obtained for certain projects as delineated by the Federal Government. Unfortunately, "on the ground works" and business as usual projects, such as the employment of Extension Officers in the core is not on the list of approved items.

As suggested at a White Paper Delivery Leadership Group meeting, a collaborative approach has been adopted by the VSTWP and wherever possible, identification, control and management brochures supplied by other weed and pest groups i.e. Gorse, Blackberry and Rabbits), have been included at the VSTWP Field Day and Ag Show.

The 2018-19 White Paper projects included:

- Social Science Research: Professor Allan Curtis provided an intensive research paper aimed at motivating disengaged landowners. The research findings were shared with other weed and pest management groups.
- Applied Science Research: Professor Singarayer Florentine has commenced a two-year program which will endeavour to provide improved/alternative/new management practices for control of serrated tussock.
- Communications Plan: A new Communications Plan was adopted by the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party and is proving to be highly suitable. The Communication Plan was developed to ensure that communication and engagement undertaken by the VSTWP contributes effectively to the objectives of the 2018-23 Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy, which requires the VSTWP to provide leadership by promoting a cooperative approach to serrated tussock control, and to maintain awareness and motivation among stakeholders by building its presence in affected communities.
- Updating the VSTWP website to word press format and the inclusion of a number of new features and content.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Three key objectives were identified in the Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy 2018-2023, which provide clear focus for the VSTWP over the next four years. These objectives are:

- To build community capability to prevent and manage serrated tussock
- To reduce the current impact of serrated tussock on affected communities
- To restrict the establishment and spread of serrated tussock in Victoria.

In order to service these three objectives, it was necessary to make application to AgVic for increased funding. Unfortunately, the application was declined. Not with standing, eventually it must be recognised by Agriculture Victoria and the state government; if the VSTWP is to function efficiently, increased funding must be provided.

The effective long-term management of serrated tussock in Victoria, exemplifies one of the three key rural challenges of our time, the others being climate change and drought. The VSTWP recognises the need to control the spread of serrated tussock and to control existing core infestations as well as the need to provide best practice information to those farmers on whom we rely to grow our meat and agricultural products.

Approximately 93% of all food products consumed in Australia are grown in Australia, yet at this time millions of hectares of arable farmland in Victoria are infested by serrated tussock. If left unattended due to lack of funding by federal and state governments, the infestation will increase exponentially in the coming years.

It is anticipated that 2019-20 will witness a further generational change in the VSTWP's operational structure. More Extension Officers will be required and employed in defined zones of Victoria. Education, support and encouragement are required for those who face the daunting task of controlling serrated tussock.

Finally, a huge thank you to the dedicated volunteer members of the Working Party who have made my tenure as Chairman a challenging and worthwhile experience. I am indebted to each of you for your collective wisdom, enthusiasm and endurance. I look forward to continuing working with you as a volunteer member.

To the VSTWP Extension Officers thank you for your continued operational excellence and support.

John Burgess



John Burgess,
Chairperson of the VSTWP



SERRATED TUSSOCK

Native to South America, serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) is a highly invasive, tussock forming grass that is capable of growing in a range of climates and soil types.

Serrated tussock is a declared noxious weed in Victoria and is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) due to its highly invasive nature, its negative impacts on agricultural production and its threat to biodiversity. Plants readily invade agricultural land, native grasslands and grassy woodlands, and will rapidly infest areas of bare ground. Each mature serrated tussock plant can produce more than 100,000 seeds in a year, which is mostly dispersed by wind; however seeds can also be carried in fodder, vehicles or livestock and transported over vast distances.

The occurrence of serrated tussock in Victoria was first documented in 1954 at a site in Melbourne's north. In 1997 the estimated area of serrated tussock in Victoria was 240,000 hectares, but its potential distribution has been predicted to cover 4.6 million hectares in Victoria or one fifth of the state. Serrated tussock is also found in New South Wales and Tasmania.

Figure 1 shows where serrated tussock is currently found in Victoria. If left unmanaged it is estimated that serrated tussock has the potential to infest roughly two-thirds of arable and grazing land in Victoria.

SERRATED TUSSOCK DISTRIBUTION

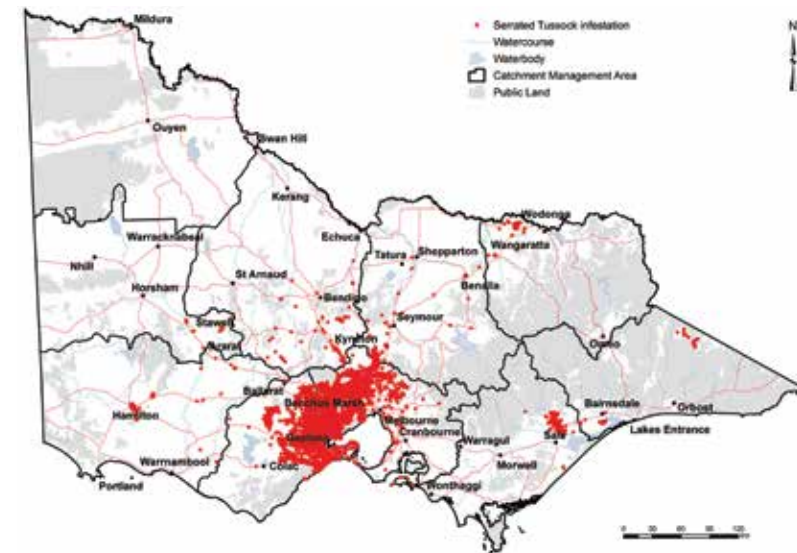


Figure 1: Distribution of serrated tussock in Victoria. (DJPR, 2017)

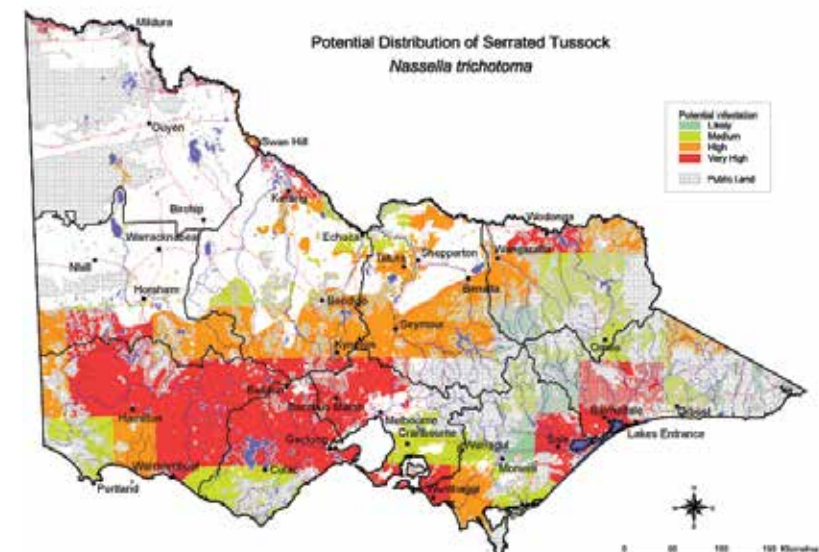


Figure 2: The potential distribution of serrated tussock in Victoria. (CSIRO, 2012)

THE VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) is a community driven group focused on serrated tussock management in Victoria, and an incorporated non-profit organisation. It formed in 1995 in response to community concern about serrated tussock, and has successfully contributed to reducing the spread of serrated tussock across Victoria.

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Program has conducted and/or sponsored a wide range of serrated tussock programs. These include undertaking research into pastures and herbicide technology, production of appropriate extension materials, provision of incentives to land managers and community groups and comprehensive mapping, extension, monitoring and compliance campaigns. A coordinated management program where a combination of control methods is used has shown to be the most effective way of controlling this noxious weed.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Since its formation the VSTWP has been responsible for the development and implementation of a number of management strategies; these documents have not only provided direction but have been fundamental in promoting a coordinated community-led approach to serrated tussock control throughout Victoria.

The VSTWP has strived in partnership with all levels of Government and their agencies, industry, research institutions, Landcare and the wider community to achieve the original recommendations of the strategy. In 2018, the VSTWP developed a new Victorian Serrated Tussock Control Strategy 2018-2023.

The new strategy outlines how the VSTWP will support communities impacted by serrated tussock and communities at risk of infestation. The strategy also addresses pathways of spread, maintaining awareness and motivation among stakeholders, along with the need for increasing collaboration and innovation.

Some key actions of the new strategy include the design of a new extension program for community groups and the co-ordination of land managers (both private and public), as well as industry and government in a bid to reduce the impact of serrated tussock to more manageable levels.

Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) Chair John Burgess said the two-pronged approach represented a commitment to the previous strategy, such as supporting affected local communities in the area known as the core (Melbourne-Geelong-Bacchus Marsh), with the addition of a stronger emphasis on raising community awareness and preparedness across Victoria more generally *“With serrated tussock infestations occurring in isolated areas from north east Victoria through to south western Victoria, the VSTWP will extend its support to other communities, so they are equipped to manage land and spread, and prevent serrated tussock becoming an intractable problem,”* Mr Burgess said.

“Building on the achievements and lessons from over 20 years of community driven leadership, the VSTWP has prepared its new strategy to guide its work through to 2023.”

Along with a range of awareness raising exercises, the strategy suggests trialling different ways of delivering serrated tussock extension programs, such as using short-term contractors or local government, and outlines its plans to prioritise areas where the weed is most likely to spread, such as linear reserves, through fodder and livestock movement, water movement and wind direction when the weed is seeding.

VSTWP EXTENSION PROGRAM

The VSTWP has found most effective way to reduce the spread of serrated tussock from the core infestation is through its Extension Programs. At the heart of these programs is their community focus, engaging landowners and empowering them to voluntarily achieve high levels of serrated tussock control. The VSTWP now completes a second season of inspections for landowner that have not adequately controlled serrated tussock. Where extension efforts are unsuccessful in convincing landowners of their obligations to control serrated tussock, Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions (DJPR) compliance is then recommended to support the sustained action of the majority of landowners.

Experienced Extension Officers are engaged by the VSTWP to work with landholders within defined project areas, offering tailored serrated tussock identification and management advice. In 2018/19, our Extension Officers delivered extension projects in;

- Bannockburn South
- Bullengarook Stage 2

Providing expert one-to-one advice is recognised to be most beneficial to landholders and forms the foundation of success; personalised advice provides the landholder with the capacity and confidence to successfully achieve long-term control of serrated tussock on their property. The experience and expertise of our Extension Officers and relationships with communities are what makes our extension projects so effective and successful.

The VSTWP Extension Project provided the delivery of extension (educational) services to communities affected by serrated tussock, in order to raise awareness of the invasive plant, to promote best practice management and to encourage communities to voluntarily manage the invasive species.

Extension Officers contracted to the VSTWP form strong working relationship with various stakeholders including private landowners, landcare, industry, community groups, local government, Catchment Management Authorities and the State Government.

Landholders in the extension area received:

- An invite to an information day to launch the extension project
- A landholder information package detailing serrated tussock identification, control and management options
- Individual property visits to inspect for serrated tussock
- Property maps containing mapped serrated tussock infestations
- Technical advice on serrated tussock control and management for each situation
- Information on the local landcare group



James Boyd at his property on the Barwon River, 12 months after carrying out aerial spraying with flupropanate for serrated tussock (May 2019).



Figure 3: VSTWP Extension Areas 2018/19 (DJPR 2019)

BANNOCKBURN SOUTH

This project area was located south of the township of Bannockburn and bounded by the Bannockburn-Shelford Rd, Native Hut Creek to the west, Hamilton Highway to the south and Stonehaven to the east. It covers a total area of 8,264 ha and includes the ephemeral waterways of Native Hut Creek and Bruce's Creek.

VSTWP Extension Officer, Tim Johnston began the project by attending the Bannockburn Farmers market in collaboration with the Geelong Landcare Network. Twelve serrated tussock enquiries were received, with 3 landholders located within the project area. The Geelong Landcare Network are commended for regular promoting serrated tussock control at this market.

Most of the larger properties to the west and south of the area were large commercial agricultural enterprises, focussing on broad-acre grain production or pasture grazing by sheep. These landholders generally had good serrated tussock control programs in place and were very supportive of the program.

The key problem areas for serrated tussock were generally on smaller land holdings with a non-commercial focus. Some of the smaller landholders had limited exposure to best practice land management practices and were generally appreciative of the project's activities, with most landholders taking on-board some of the advice provided to them.

A V/Line leased rail corridor which runs from the Midland Hwy overpass to Inverleigh, harboured some significant infestations, particularly along the stretch from Gheringhap to Burnside Road. Serrated tussock was also evident along the Hamilton Hwy and Midland Hwy, both of which are managed by Vic Roads. Most Golden Plains Shire managed roads were well maintained for serrated tussock. The 340 ha 'Bannockburn Bush Flora & Fauna Reserve' was well maintained by the Ballarat Environment Network in partnership with Parks Victoria.



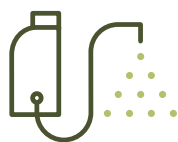
8,264 Ha
of assessed land



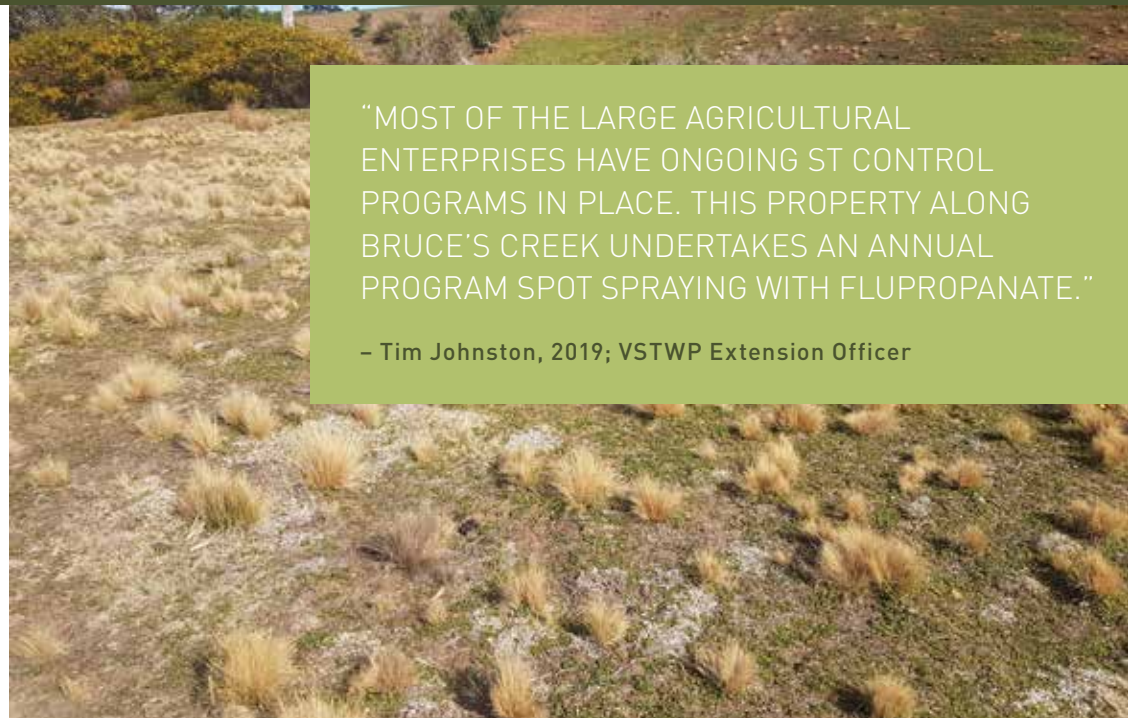
117
properties
assessed



331 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



174 Ha
treated for
serrated tussock



"MOST OF THE LARGE AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES HAVE ONGOING ST CONTROL PROGRAMS IN PLACE. THIS PROPERTY ALONG BRUCE'S CREEK UNDERTAKES AN ANNUAL PROGRAM SPOT SPRAYING WITH FLUPROPANATE."

– Tim Johnston, 2019; VSTWP Extension Officer



Figure 4: Bannockburn South Extension Area. [DJPR, 2019]

“IT WAS PLEASING TO SEE THE VSTWP WORK IN THIS AREA THAT HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN ABOUT IN THE PAST DECADE. IT HAS REMINDED PEOPLE TO KEEP ON TOP OF THEIR TUSSOCK EACH YEAR, WITH THE SUPPORT OF WORKS FROM NEIGHBOURS AND PUBLIC LAND MANAGERS”

-Jim Fisher, Toolernvale Landowner



Figure 5: Bullengarook Stage 2 Extension Area. [DJPR, 2019]

BULLENGAROOK STAGE 2

The Bullengarook Stage 2 project area covers 5,039 hectares and lies within the Upper Jacksons Catchment, an area known for its natural temperate grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains and ecological values. The land systems contain a mix of mostly cleared land and some excellent grasslands that have been used for agricultural production and hobby farm purposes.

Common indigenous ground cover grasses found in this area include Common Tussock grass (*Poa labillardierei*), Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia* spp.) and various Spear Grass (*Austrostipa* spp.) Green Rush (*Juncus gregiflorus*), with some good specimens of endemic tea trees and acacias. There were a variety of invasive plant issues, with serrated tussock found scattered throughout most of area, and higher densities in the south.

The success of the Bullengarook Stage 2 can be attributed to the City of Melton rate rebate program, and the Toolernvale Landcare Group.

The local Landcare group was successful in spreading the project's key messages and both City of Melton and Macedon Ranges Shire did a great job in treating the roadside infestations. The landcare group was keen for the VSTWP to present the project to their members, highlighting their keenness for the project.

The door to door approach was important in contacting landowners who did not respond to the introduction letter, information day or media article. There were many successful outcomes from property visits and face to face interactions. Despite the good control works conducted by most landowners, a couple of large infestations of serrated tussock remained uncontrolled. These landowners were not able to be contacted, despite numerous visits, letters and calling cards. A second year of extension will be provided to these landowners.

The project has provided some important services to landowners who have battled serrated tussock for decades. It also reminded landowners that serrated tussock is an ongoing battle and that persistence will reap rewards and lower long-term costs.



5,039 Ha
of assessed land



205
land managers
engaged



65 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



52 Ha
treated for
serrated tussock

SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2018 – 2019



13,300 Ha

assessed for
serrated tussock



2,500+

pieces of extension
material distributed



45

attendees at the Diggers Rest
Serrated Tussock Field Day



8

community radio
station interviews



9,000

video views on the
YouTube channel



100

landowner signs
installed in infested
areas

Extension program

- Over 13,000 hectares assessed for serrated tussock and 282 landholders provided with educational services.
- 226 hectares treated for serrated tussock throughout the two extension projects.

Engagement

- Over 2,500 pieces of extension material distributed through 12 field days, two stakeholder events, community engagement activities, enquires and extension projects.
- Interviews on ABC Country Hour, ABC Western Victoria, Voice FM, ABC Bendigo, Bay FM and Maine FM.
- 45 attendees at the Diggers Rest Serrated Tussock Field Day, a record for our organisation.

Publications

- Distribution of four editions of the Tussock Times newsletter, delivered to over 320 subscribers via e-news and mailouts.

- Updated Best Practice Management Brochure for the first time in two decades.
- The production of three new case studies highlighting successful serrated tussock management from the most recent extension areas.
- The production of a Rowsley Valley Case Study: 20 Years on, to celebrate the management of tussock in the region.
- The publication of serrated tussock media articles in ten local government newsletters across the state, and twelve community newspapers, promoting the VSTWP.

Promotion

- An overhaul of the VSTWP 10-year-old website, with a fresh WordPress format and increased video content.
- VSTWP Facebook link added to website, gaining 275 followers, an increase of 30% over the 12 months.
- YouTube channel updated, featuring two new videos attaining over 9,000 views, increase of 30% over the 12 months.
- Major Radio Advertising on the Macquarie Media Network and Bay FM for three weeks, highlighting the services offered by the VSTWP. Website users during this period was an average of 250 users per day.
- Eight Community Radio Interviews and Community Service Announcements, promoting the VSTWP and our achievements.
- The production and installation of 100 landowner signs in infested area, across eight local government areas, reminding landowners to be persistent in the treatment of serrated tussock.
- Serrated tussock signage displayed at Farm Supply Stalls across the State.

Research

- Continued funding for applied science research through Federation University to provide improved management practices for control of serrated tussock.
- Contributing funding to international research into biological control methods for serrated tussock.

Strategic Actions

- Review and develop the 2018-23 Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy.
- Continued success in receiving funds through the Federal Government Ag White Paper, to deliver a variety of innovative projects.
- The second Stakeholder Forum bringing together stakeholders from the core area to collaborate and share ideas for better management of serrated tussock, resulting in agreed strategic actions.

THANK YOU

The VSTWP Committee would like to thank the following groups and organisations for their ongoing support:

The large number of Landcare groups and Local councils that have contributed to the success of our projects.

The following local councils, where our extension projects were run:

- Moorabool Shire
- Golden Plains Shire
- Macedon Ranges Shire
- City of Melton
- Agriculture Victoria (Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions)
- Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper

Without you, our serrated tussock projects would not be as effective as they are today. We greatly appreciate the time, dedication and interest that has been put towards controlling serrated tussock.

VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY

For more information please visit:

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